

Proposed Kingsmill cell towers would be near historic site

By Dan Parsons

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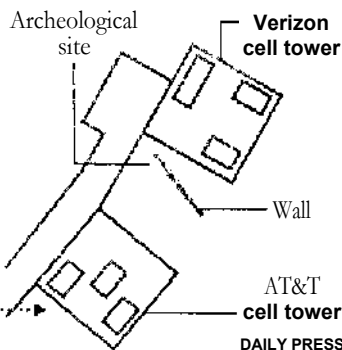
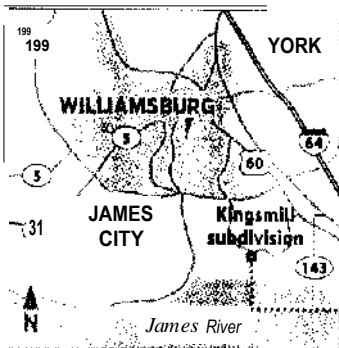
JAMES CITY — Whether or not a Gloucester judge rules in their favor later this year, opponents of the cellular towers proposed for Kingsmill have a not-so-secret weapon.

Found at the site where AT&T and Verizon Wireless have applied to build two 120-foot "monopine" antennae is Site 44JC1140 — code for the 1,140th historical site found in James City County.

The state Department of Historical Resources, which gave it that designation, believe artifacts at the site indicate it may have been the location of former slave quarters dating from the late 18th century, said DHR spokesman Randy Jones.

At the site is a 40-foot-long foundation of a brick wall and several other features from what appears to have been a building associated with the Kingsmill Plantation. That building, reconstructed

Proposed cell towers



nearby, is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and is therefore protected from development, which makes site 44JC1140 eligible by association, said Jones.

That means the cellular companies had to conduct a study of the site, which was done from December 2006 to January 2007 and approved by DHR. The site has already yielded more than 1,200 artifacts dating from the late 18th and

early 19th centuries, according to DHR records.

"From what we understand, the site appears to be one wall of what was a former slave quarters associated with the nearby plantation," Jones said.

Following that study, the companies altered slightly their towers plans so the impact to the historical site would be limited. As it stands, the two 70-square-foot

What's next?

A Gloucester Circuit Judge is scheduled Sept. 16 to consider the merits of lawsuits filed over the proposed cellular towers at Kingsmill. If and when the towers are approved, the cellular companies must develop an archaeological treatment plan before construction can begin.

"lease boxes," wherein the towers and associated equipment would be installed, straddle the site.

But that's not good enough, according to the National Historic Preservation Act. If the cellular companies want to build on the site, they must put together a plan to mitigate the impacts to the cultural resources that are there.

In 2007, DUB determined that the proposed towers would have

an adverse effect on the site and told the cellular companies that an archaeological treatment plan would be necessary to begin construction.

Enter the Kingsmill Wireless Communications Advocacy Group, which opposes the towers as detrimental to the character of the planned development, but advocates boosting cell service for residents.

"We intend to use that as a second line of defense," said Bill Halteman, who helms the advocacy group. "No one spade, not one pile of dirt can be turned over at that site until there is a memorandum of understanding between the DUB, the federal government and the carriers that says they are going to be good stewards to that site."

That could tack on a healthy sum to the project cost. But it's not unheard of for corporations to shoulder the challenge of preserving history in order to progress.

Across Route 199, Riverside

Health Systems encountered site 44WB0100 —related to the Revolutionary Battle of Williamsburg—and has put forth a \$400,000 plan to preserve and showcase the site and its relics.

But DER hasn't received word of such a plan from the cellular companies, and hasn't heard anything from them in over a year, Jones said.

That's probably because the fate of the towers is held up in court, he said.

A Gloucester Circuit judge is scheduled to consider the merits of several lawsuits seeking approval of the towers Sept. 16.

If the towers' proposal is finally given the green light, Jones said DHR will be committed to working with the cellular companies to preserve the site, though it is the 1,140th one registered in the county and not nearly the first within Kingsmill.

"You never know what you're going to find until you excavate and study a site," Jones said.